

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5902
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AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 KUALA LUMPUR 6449

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJ: GOM VIEWS ON REFUGEE SITUATION

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 5859 DTG 150819Z JUN 78, B) KUALA LUMPUR
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1. SUMMARY. VISITING STATE DEPARTMENT REFUGEE EXPERTS MET JUNE
23 WITH MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS INCLUDING SECRETARY OF MALAYSIAN
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, THE GOM ENTITY MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR
REFUGEE AFFAIRS. GOM SIDE REITERATED MALAYSIAN POLICY TO CONTINUE
OFFERING TEMPORARY SAFEHAVEN FOR REFUGEES PENDING RESETTLEMENT
ELSEWHERE. THEY STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT CURRENT INFLOW IS STRAIN-
ING THEIR LIMITS TO COPE WITH ACCOMMODATING REFUGEES ON EVEN A
TEMPORARY BASIS. THEY LOOK TO US, AUSTRALIANS, UNHCR AND OTHERS TO
HELP RELIEVE THIS BURDEN. THEY EXPRESSED PARTICULAR INTEREST IN
KNOWING WHAT SHARE MALAYSIA WILL RECEIVE OF NEW BOAT CASE
NUMBERS, BOTH FOR PLANNING PURPOSES AND FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS USE
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TO DEFUSE CRITICS OF THEIR LIBERAL REFUGEE POLICY. STATE DEPT. REP
EXPLAINED NEW US REFUGEE PROGRAM, ASSURED GOM OFFICIALS THAT
MALAYSIA WOULD PROBABLY RECEIVE THE "BULK" OF THESE BOAT CASE
NUMBERS IN VIEW OF CURRENT CASELOAD HERE, AND CITED THE LONG-
TERM COMMITMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATION AS A DEVELOPMENT THAT
THE MALAYSIANS AND OTHERS SHOULD CONSIDER ENCOURAGING. BOTH SIDES
AGREED THE OUTFLOW FROM VIETNAM IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE, DIS-

CUSSED FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS, INCLUDING SRV POLICIES, BUT NEITHER HAD ANY DEFINITIVE INSIGHTS ON THE LIKELY FUTURE DIMENSIONS OF THE FLOW. THE MEETING PROVIDED A VERY USEFUL OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE VIEWS AND RESTATE OUR JOINT COMMITMENTS TO COLLABORATE IN THIS HUMANITARIAN ENDEAVOR. END SUMMARY.

2. VISITING HA/ORM DIRECTOR SHEPARD LOWMAN, EA REPRESENTATIVE FRIEDMAN AND EMBASSY REFUGEE AND POLITICAL OFFICERS MET JUNE 23 WITH MALAYSIAN NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL (NSC) SECRETARY ABDUL MALIK BIN ABDUL AZIZ, SEVERAL OF HIS AIDES, AND REPRESENT-

ATIVES OF MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND WELFARE TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON VIETNAMESE REFUGEE SITUATION. LOWMAN DESCRIBED THE NEWLY ANNOUNCED US PAROLE PROGRAM (IPP-79/LRP) FOR AN ADDITIONAL 25,000 INDOCHINESE REFUGEES OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, OF WHOM 12,500 WOULD COME FROM LAND CAMP POPULATIONS AND THE REMAINING 12,500 FROM THE BOAT CASE REFUGEES. ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT PROVIDE A BREAK-DOWN AS TO HOW THESE NUMBERS WILL ACTUALLY BE ALLOCATED AMONG THE COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM, WE ASSUME ON THE BASIS OF THE CURRENT CASELOAD THAT MALAYSIA WOULD RECEIVE THE "LION'S SHARE" OF THESE BOAT CASE NUMBERS, HE NOTED. LOWMAN STRESSED THE ADMINISTRATION'S COMMITMENT AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS TO AN ONGOING PROGRAM TO REPLACE THE SERIES OF AD HOC MEASURES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS TO DEAL WITH THE REFUGEE OUTFLOW. THE ADMINISTRATION THEREFORE HOPES TO SEE LEGISLATION ENACTED TO PROVIDE FOR A CONTINUING INTAKE AT APPROPRIATE LEVELS TO RESPOND TO WHAT WE CONFIDENTIAL

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FORESEE AS A LONG-TERM PROBLEM. MEANWHILE, WE WILL DO ALL WE CAN TO EXPEDITE THE PROCESSING AND DEPARTURE OF THOSE REFUGEES QUALIFYING FOR OUR CURRENT PROGRAM.

3. LOWMAN ALSO EXPRESSED USG'S GRATITUDE FOR MALAYSIA'S HELP IN OFFERING FIRST ASYLUM TO THESE REFUGEES, EMPHASIZED OUR DETERMINATION NOT TO SEE MALAYSIA AND THE OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION WHO HAVE PROVIDED TEMPORARY SAFE HAVEN FOR "BOAT CASES" BEING SADDLED WITH AN UNFAIR BURDEN, AND OUR HOPE THEREFORE THAT OTHERS WOULD JOIN US, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE COORDINATING ROLE OF THE UNHCR, IN RESETTLING THESE REFUGEES. WE ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED, HE NOTED, IN GOM'S PERCEPTION OF FUTURE DIMENSIONS OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM.

4. THROUGHOUT THE ENSUING DISCUSSION ABDUL MALIK STRESSED MALAYSIA'S DEEP CONCERNS ABOUT THE BURGEONING REFUGEE INFLUX AND CONSEQUENT BUILDUP IN THE CAMPS. HE SAID THAT WHEREAS THE GOM IS ABLE TO COPE WITH THE VARIOUS HOUSEKEEPING AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS POSED BY THE REFUGEES AS LONG AS THEIR NUMBERS DO NOT EXCEED 3,000 OR SO, NUMBERS IN THE CURRENT RANGE OF 10,000 MAKE THE GOM'S DIFFICULTIES MUCH MORE ACUTE. POLITICIANS, PARTICULARLY ON THE EAST COAST, ARE GRUMBLING.

THERE IS PUBLIC AWARENESS OF IMBALANCES IN THE REFUGEE BURDEN
AMONG THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES. CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS
BECOME INTOLERABLE, DUE TO OVERCROWDING AND LACK OF

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AMENITIES, AND THIS IS NOT RIGHT FROM A HUMANITARIAN
PERSPECTIVE. ALSO, THE GOM FEARS THAT DELAYS IN
PROCESSING REFUGEES WILL LEAD THEM, PARTICULARLY
THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HERE FOR A LONG TIME, TO BECOME
"RESTLESS."

5. ABDUL MALIK PRESSED HARD FOR A MORE EXPLICIT
COMMITMENT OF THE SHARE OF THE NEW 12,500 NUMBERS
AVAILABLE FOR BOAT CASE REFUGEES THAT MALAYSIA COULD
EXPECT TO RECEIVE, BOTH FOR PLANNING PURPOSES AND
FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS USE. LOWAMN REPLIED THAT WE
COULD NOT SAY FOR CERTAIN SINCE WE NEED TO RETAIN
SUFFICIENT FLEXIBILITY TO BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO
EMERGENCY SITUATIONS. NONETHELESS, OUR EXPECTATION
IS THAT MALAYSIA WILL PROBABLY RECEIVE THE BULK
OF THE NEW BOAT CASE NUMBERS. LOWMAN NOTED THAT
OUR COMMITMENT WAS TO ASSIST THE COUNTRIES OF
FIRST ASYLUM IN DEALING WITH THIS PROBLEM. IF
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CURRENT PROGRAMS OF REFUGEE-RECEIVING NATIONS REMAINED INSUFFICIENT BECAUSE OF A NEW HIGHER RATE OF FLOW, WE AND OTHERS WOULD HAVE TO REASSESS THE PROBLEM TO SEE WHAT FURTHER MEASURES MIGHT BE NEEDED.

6. IN THIS CONNECTION, MFA REPRESENTATIVE ABDUL HALIM ALI, WHOSE RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE THE ASEAN COUNTRIES, NOTED ASEAN CONCERNS OVER THE REFUGEE ISSUE AS REFLECTED IN DISCUSSIONS AND PUBLIC REMARKS AT THE RECENT ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S CONFERENCE. HE SAID THAT INDOCHINESE REFUGEES WOULD BE AN AGENDA ITEM FOR THE US-ASEAN DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON "LATER THIS YEAR" IN HOPES THAT THE US WOULD BE ABLE TO EXERT ITS INFLUENCE ON OTHER COUNTRIES TO PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN RESETTLEMENT EFFORTS. THERE WAS ALSO DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE THE UNHCR MIGHT PLAY BOTH IN COORDINATING THE EFFORTS OF COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM AND COUNTRIES OF TRADITIONAL IMMIGRATION AND IN SEEKING FURTHER RESETTLEMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

7. THE FINAL PORTION OF THE HOUR AND ONE-HALF LONG DISCUSSION CENTERED ON FUTURE PROJECTIONS OF THE REFUGEE OUTFLOW, INCLUDING THE IMPACT OF SRV POLICIES. THE MALAYSIANS POINTED TO THE INCREASED OUTFLOW OF VIETNAMESE OF CHINESE EXTRACTION, PRESUMABLY RESULTING FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SRV'S SOCIALIST PROGRAMS. THEY NOTED THAT SINCE THE SRV SEEMS TO BE LETTING REFUGEES ESCAPE (OR AT LEAST NOT ASSERTING ALL MEANS THAT THE MALAYSIANS ASSUME THE SRV AUTHORITIES HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL), THE REFUGEE FLOW IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE
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FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

8. LOWMAN TOOK EXCEPTION WITH THIS FORMULATION, NOTING THAT THE SOCIALIST POLICIES AFFECT MIDDLE-CLASS ETHNIC VIETNAMESE AND CHINESE ALIKE, AND THE PICTURE THAT WE HAVE FROM REFUGEE INTERVIEWS IS THAT THE SRV DOES ALL IN ITS POWER TO PREVENT SUCH ESCAPES; THE REFUGEE OUTFLOW THUS REFLECTS INCOMPLETE CONTROL BY THE SRV AUTHORITIES. EMBASSY REFUGEE OFFICER GETTIER ADDED HIS GRIM ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF UPROOTING URBAN DWELLERS, REGARD-

LESS OF RACIAL ORIGINS, FOR RESETTELEMENT IN THE
"NEW ECONOMIC ZONES."

9. ONE OF THE MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS PRESENT CLARIFIED THE POINT ON SRV ATTITUDES BY CITING DISCUSSIONS WITH SRV OFFICIALS IN WHICH THE LATTER INDICATED THAT WHILE THEY TRIED TO CONTROL THE REFUGEE OUTFLOW, THEY WERE NOT OVERLY CONCERNED BY THE FACT THAT MANY SUCCEEDED IN ESCAPING. ANOTHER MALAYSIAN PARTICIPANT INQUIRED WHETHER THE USG HAD APPROACHED THE SRV ON THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. LOWMAN REPLIED THAT THE SRV REPRESENTATIVES HAD RAISED THIS SUBJECT WITH US BUT IN POLEMICAL TONES CHARGING THAT THE USG IS SOMEHOW PROMPTING THE REFUGEE FLOW.

10. THE IMPACT OF THE WEATHER ON THE RATE OF REFUGEE DEPARTURES FROM VIETNAM/ARRIVALS IN MALAYSIA WAS DISCUSSED AT LENGTH, THE MALAYSIANS CITING SURPRISINGLY HIGH ARRIVAL RATES DURING LAST YEAR'S STORMY WEATHER PERIOD ON THE EAST COAST (MID-OCTOBER THRU DECEMBER), CONTRASTED TO LOWER AVERAGES FOR THE PRECEDING JUNE, JULY AND AUGUST TIME FRAME. IT WAS AGREED THAT PERHAPS REFUGEE DEPARTURES, TO THE EXTENT AFFECTED BY WEATHER, CONFIDENTIAL

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TAPER OFF DURING BAD WEATHER PERIODS IN VIETNAMESE COASTAL AREAS WHICH DO NOT NECESSARILY COINCIDE WITH MALAYSIA COASTAL WEATHER PATTERNS.

11. ABDUL MALIK REITERATED CONCERNS ABOUT THE RACIAL ASPECT OF THE REFUGEE FLOW, WHICH IF CARRIED TO EXTREMES COULD TOTAL TWO MILLION, WHAT HE UNDERSTOOD IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CHOLON CHINESE. LOWMAN NOTED THAT THERE WERE SEVERE CONSTRAINTS ON THE DEPARTURE OF ANY SUCH NUMBER. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE CURRENT DIMENSIONS MAY REFLECT A "BULGE" INCORPORATING THOSE WHO HAVE NOW DECIDED THEY CANNOT ACCOMODATE THEMSELVES TO THE NEW REGIME AND HAVE THE WHEREWITHAL, FINANCIAL AND OTHERWISE, TO EFFECT THEIR ESCAPES AT THIS TIME. THESE ESCAPE CAPABILITIES, WE SUSPECT, WILL DIMINISH WITH TIME IF THE MORE "INDIGESTIBLE ELEMENTS" OF THE POPULATION ARE MOVED TO THE

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NEW ECONOMIC ZONES, AS INDICATED IN RECENT SRV DECLARATIONS.
A FINAL ELEMENT, AND ONE WHICH WE HOPE IS A PRECURSOR OF
THINGS TO COME, IS A RECENT REPORT OF SRV WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW
A LIMITED NUMBER OF IMMEDIATE RELATIVES -- CHILDREN OR SPOUSES
OF US CITIZENS -- TO LEAVE VIETNAM. IF PROCEDURES EVOLVE OVER
TIME TO ENABLE SUCH PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE SRV IN SIGNIFICANT
NUMBERS, THEN PEOPLE WILL BE LESS LIKELY TO RISK HAZARDOUS
OCEAN CROSSINGS TO GET OUT.

12. LOWMAN ASKED ABOUT MALAYSIAN POLICY TOWARD THE REFUGEES,
WHAT IT IS AND WHETHER IT HAS CHANGED OF LATE, NOTING THAT IN
HIS INTERVIEWS WITH REFUGEES IN MALAYSIAN CAMPS THEY HAD CITED
SOME INCREASED "RESISTANCE" TO LANDING IN MALAYSIA IN RECENT
MONTHS. BOTH ABDUL MALIK AND THE MFA REPRESENTATIVE STATED
CATEGORICALLY THAT MALAYSIAN POLICY REMAINS THE SAME AS
EXPRESSED BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO AMBASSADOR MILLER SEVERAL
WEEKS AGO (SEE KUALALUMPUR 4395) I.E., THAT REFUGEES WOULD
BE ALLOWED TEMPORARY ASYLUM IN MALAYSIA PENDING PERMANENT
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RESETTLEMENT ELSEWHERE. ABDUL MALIK STATED THAT IN THIS
REGARD "WE (GOM) HAVE NO CHOICE. THEY COME, AND IT IS OUR
HUMANITARIAN DUTY TO ACCEPT THEM FOR TEMPORARY ASYLUM." RECENT
STATEMENTS BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE HOME MINISTER WERE

"FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION," ONE OFFICIAL NOTED. ABDUL MALIK EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE REMAIN LIMITS AS TO HOW MANY REFUGEES MALAYSIA CAN ACCOMMODATE EVEN ON A TEMPORARY BASIS, AND THE GOM HOPES THE US AND OTHERS CAN RELIEVE THIS BURDEN.

13. IN CONCLUSION, LOWMAN REITERATED THE POINT THAT THE PRESIDENT AND THE ADMINISTRATION ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO A LONG-TERM PROGRAM TO ACCEPT INDOCHINESE REFUGEES TO ASSIST IN THE EVENTUAL DISPOSITION OF THE PROBLEM, AND THAT WE WILL LOOK FORWARD TO CONTINUED COOPERATION WITH MALAYSIA IN FACILITATING THIS RESETTLEMENT PROCESS.

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